This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

MR. TENNYSON'S "DESPAIR."

A Lecture

ON ITS

RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE.

BY

THOMAS WALKER.

"The Reason and the Conscience of Man are for him the Image of GOD, and as such are as sacred as anything can be; it is therefore not irreverent, but most reverent, to compare with these whatever is asserted to be Good or Evil. GOD is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things, yet in those things which our hearts do know they anticipate his sentence. This it is absolutely necessary to believe, if we would not cut from under ourselves all the foundations on which any moral judgment whatsoever can be based."—FREDERIC MYERS.

LONDON:
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW.

MDCCCLXXXII.

THE following lecture was prepared and delivered at the request of a number of believers in the Christian Revelation, who had been accustomed to read Mr. Tennyson's writings with admiration, but were startled and perplexed on reading "Despair." No apology is offered for the treatment of the dogma of Endless Punishment from the Christian point of view by a layman. The interest of the so-called laity in the subject cannot be inferior to that of the clergy, and if the author felt that any additional justification of his attempt were necessary, he would point to the zealous and too-often successful endeavours of some influential laymen to make it dangerous for ministers of religion to treat the question with the freedom which befits earnest inquiry.

MR. TENNYSON'S "DESPAIR."

IF there is one living author between whom and the public a complete mutual understanding might have been believed to exist, that author is Mr. Tennyson. Yet after nourishing and forming the thought of two generations, he has compelled some of the most trustful of his readers to pause and ask with surprise—What does he mean? Whither would he lead us? A first glance at "Despair; a Dramatic Monologue," showed that the old unimpaired power of the Laureate had been employed for purposes beyond the common scope of the poetic art. Here certainly was no "joy for ever." In truth the highest literary skill had been exerted to produce one of the most unpleasant poems ever written or to be imagined. If, then, the verses could not minister delight, they must surely have been intended for instruction. But what was to be learned from the disordered fancies and angry recriminations of a madman? Evidently if the poem was to serve any useful purpose whatever, it must do so by first stimulating inquiry and provoking reflection. But reflection and inquiry are troublesome processes, seldom undertaken without some definite view of the gain by which they are to be recompensed. The reception of the poem corresponded to its contents. Art

and Culture could no more accept than disown it, and sulked. Society was vexed that its conventional decorum had been set at nought, and muttered "indiscretion" and "scandal." The religious world groaned as if under a benumbing torpedo shock. And had the farseeing Poet braved so much hostility, and provoked all this dislike, for nothing? For an enterprise so perilous were there not a reason and a compensation? Some answer to this inquiry will emerge, it may be hoped, as we examine "Despair."

The poem opens with an outburst of bitter reproaches—for the monologue is not a soliloquy—addressed to a person who is present throughout the piece, and whose unreported suggestions are seen to give frequent turns and new animation to the action. From the prefixed "argument" we learn that the speaker is one who together with his wife had lost faith in God, and hope of a life to come, and that being utterly miserable in this, the pair had resolved to end themselves by drowning. In the attempt the woman was drowned, but the man was rescued by a minister of the sect he had abandoned. The rescued man is the monologist of the poem, and the minister the person reproached in its first verses. How, the speaker asks, could any one deserve his thanks for bringing him back to

> . . . . "three more dark days of the Godless gloom
> Of a life without sun, without health, without hope, without any delight
> In anything here upon earth"?

On that fatal night, as the two walked self-doomed to the sea, they passed the lighthouse—symbol of salvation.

. . . . "They had saved many hundreds from wreck.
Does it matter how many they saved? We are all of us wreck'd
at last."

They went on with unfaltering step, for they were "frightened at life, not death." The stars shone and sparkled, "flashing with fires as of God"; but "their light was a lie"; they were only lighting other worlds as dark as our own.

Next, these dismal convictions are accounted for, and the minister who had prepared the way for them, by making the faith of earlier days impossible, must take his share in the blame.

"See, we were nursed in the dark night-fold of your fatalist
creed."

The word "fatalist" suggests a difficulty here which recurs when we read of one who

"Made us, foreknew us, foredoom'd us, and does what He will
with His own."

Fatalism, in the common acceptation of the term, is preached in very few, and those very small, congregations in England, and only by hyper-Calvinists. As Dr. Pusey correctly states: "The rigid Calvinistic school is happily all but extinct, if not altogether extinct in England," * although its doctrines may be found in "confessions" and trust deeds. Probably Mr. Tennyson employs the word with an enlarged meaning, for we may not suppose that he intended to offer an exceptional case as a type. But to return. From the dark creed of their youth, the pair revolted:

* "What is of Faith?" etc., p. 6.

"And we turned to the growing dawn,—we had hoped for a dawn indeed,
When the light of a Sun that was coming would scatter the ghosts of the Past,
And the cramping creeds that had maddened the people would vanish at last."

But they found the new light even less supportable than the old darkness. They had

"Hoped for a dawn, and it came, but the promise had faded away.
We had passed from a cheerless night to the glare of a drearier day."

The materialistic Agnosticism to which they had turned taught them that they were "poor orphans of nothing," alone on a lonely shore. For these are "the new dark ages"

"When the bat comes out of his cave, and the owls are whooping at noon,
And Doubt is the lord of this dunghill, and crows to the sun and the moon,
Till the Sun and the Moon of our science are both of them turned into blood,
And Hope will have broken her heart, running after a shadow of good."

The severest trials of life were added to those of the mind. The eldest son had forged on his father and fled, and the second was better dead than alive. The wife had a grief which could only be cured, if at all, by the knife of the surgeon; and the man, ruined by his sons' misconduct, dreaded being at last mocked in a madhouse. Why should all this be borne if men die for ever and all griefs are in vain? So the fatal resolve is taken. If there is no other pity

in heaven or on earth, the two will pity one another and die together. But the unlooked-for intervention of the minister gives the husband new opportunities for reflection, and we have the result in agonizing passages which disclose most clearly the purpose of the poem. The rescued man justifies his renunciation of existence by asserting the impossibility of believing in God as represented in the only religious teaching he had known, and of which he lets us see the character.

"And we broke away from the Christ, our human Brother and Friend,
For He spoke, or it seemed that He spoke, of a Hell without help, without end."

And again—

"What! I should call on that Infinite Love that has served us so well?
Infinite wickedness rather, that made everlasting Hell.
. . . . . Were there a God as you say,
His Love would have power over Hell till it utterly vanished away."

One glimmer of hope at times relieves his gloom. May there not be "a God behind all—after all—the great God," for aught that one knows?

"But the God of Love and of Hell together—they cannot be thought.
If there be such a God, may the Good God curse Him and bring Him to nought."

After this the minister can only cry "Blasphemy!" and the suicide replies, "The blasphemy to *my* mind lies all in the way that you walk," and renews his vows of self-destruction.

Such, then, in its main features is the poem. It is unnecessary, and it would be useless to attempt, to express the natural feeling of horror, the sense of distress, which takes possession of the mind as the Thrice-Holy Name is brought into association with the darkest human suspicions. But the stronger this feeling, the more need is there to ask why this temporary juxtaposition has been hazarded; for the poet from whom we now have the wild language of "Despair" is the same who wrote, "Let more of reverence in us dwell." Further, let it be noted that in these unhallowed utterances, terrible as they are, it is not self-possessed pride of the Titanic kind, nor yet the settled malignity of Lucifer in Byron's "Cain" that we overhear. The violence is not that of arrogant strength, but of conscious weakness. No Prometheus is placed before us, but a poor human brother bewildered, and not knowing what he says as he staggers and sinks beneath a load too great for him. We do not see into the depth of this soul as we witness its tumult, and there is nothing in the man's disposition, as revealed in his words, to prevent his repentance when he has been recovered to a truer knowledge of his Maker. At the very worst, he has returns of a certain kind of faith, a thought, though only one that comes and goes, of a personal righteousness and goodness, that will help him in some way which he does not understand. Such resemblance between "Despair" and the poetry of the "Satanic school," as is suggested on a first glance, is found on examination to be merely verbal and superficial.

We are perhaps now in a position to recognise Mr.

Tennyson's principal object in writing this poem. We may think that we detect subsidiary purposes in its structure. The author may have desired to show, by the experience here depicted, that however satisfactory as a scheme of life Agnosticism may be to its well-to-do advocates, who, while money, ease, and comfort last, could make shift without any scheme at all, it will not bear the strain of the trials and troubles of life. But his persistent aim, as we all see, has been to exhibit the effect which the doctrine of endless sin and suffering produces in a mind religiously disposed and ready to adore a righteous and holy God, but utterly confounded by the thought of Omnipotence pitiless and unjust. Of course a picture, however vivid, proves nothing, yet it may force an important subject upon reluctant minds, and compel them to think of the necessity of something being either proved or disproved, if grave mischiefs are to be avoided, if indeed religion is to be retained as one of the beneficent forces of human life.

Year after year the problem of human destiny returns upon us with renewed urgency, and it is one as to which every religion purporting to be of divine origin will assuredly be called to declare itself. While preachers lament the indifference of hearers, the value, the import, and the issues of life are among the most familiar topics of popular discussion. Those whose function it is to watch the tendencies of the literature of the age, have for years been telling us that in the best writing there is an undertone of sadness. To most of us it seems a matter of course that dark misgivings should prevail beyond the range of Christianity. The ancient world was gloomy. Mr.

Matthew Arnold quotes Goethe as saying, "From Homer I every day learn more clearly that in our life here above ground we have properly speaking to enact Hell," and advises the student to take that remark with him as a key to the Iliad. The same wail is heard in the tragic poets of Greece, although it was the practical wisdom of that people to put out of sight the pain, perplexity, and apparent failure which have supplied the moderns with subjects for the noblest æsthetic handling. If we turn to the East, Mr. Max Müller tells us that "the sense that life is a dream or a burden is one which the Bhudda shares with every Hindoo philosopher." The popular philosophers who have succeeded the mighty thinkers of Germany are strangers to the language of hope. Schopenhauer taught that happiness is an illusion, and the world as bad as it can be to exist at all; and Hartmann, affirming against him that the world is not the worst but the best that was possible, only saddens our conception of the possibilities, by adding that nevertheless no world at all would have been better than that into which we have been born. Thus we complete the circle, coming back to the secret which Silenos imparted to Midas in the rose-garden, that "It is best of all for man not to be born: and next, for those who are born to die as soon as possible."

A disposition to despair of the world and life springing up in the heart of Christendom would, however, evidently import more than the same feeling outside its pale. It was to put an end to the gloomy thoughts of men destitute of a true knowledge of God, that the Christian religion was given to the world,

so that a revival of such thoughts now ought to give its adherents real concern. Doubtless much of the pessimism of which we hear is merely the querulousness born of a civilization in which the means of material enjoyment have been multiplied and extended on a scale out of proportion to the increased influence of moral ideas. But there is also a sadness of nobler souls which is not to be thus accounted for, and for the causes of which it is necessary to make inquiry.

Chief among these, it is believed, is that upon which Mr. Tennyson has laid his hand in "Despair." The age is sad because the comforting face of God has been obscured by clouds. The doctrine that sin and sorrow are to last as long as the throne of the Almighty is one which when sincerely believed cannot stand alone, but must fix the whole complexion of the religion of which it is a part. The saints are represented as resting securely in the Divine righteousness and goodness. But they have not a monopoly of their Maker's regard, and there is no man, however far he may have wandered from virtue, who has not the heaviest stake in the character of God. Now the misfortune is that the Church, which has the Divine oracles in charge,—the Church, which has for its chief work to make known the true character of God, has done much to make it difficult for man to trust Him. Considering that the Church is continually holding forth the Cross of Christ, it might have been thought impossible for it to obscure the character of God; nevertheless, this has been done, and is being done daily before our eyes. The preacher goes forth resolved, as he thinks, to know nothing among men but Jesus

Christ and Him crucified. But he finds himself among men whose minds are already possessed by other cares. There are prior questions which perplex them. What is this life which presses on them with so heavy a load? Is it a probation or an education? and what issues are suspended on its few and evil years? The preacher, too, feels that he has himself raised questions which come before that of the Cross, for he proclaims a salvation the very excellency of which is that it rescues man from a lot of endless sorrow and pain. Yes; the endlessness of suffering, the endlessness of sin are the preliminary announcements of what is tendered to man as the Gospel, the "good news" of grace. Men who hear this say, some openly, some merely in their hearts, "Is this possible? Can it be true? Has God indeed then made endless pain the penalty of the trespasses and shortcomings of this brief and troubled life? Can it be His will that sin against Him and the suffering which must attend it shall continue for ever? Or if such cannot be His will, is He powerless to prevent it?" When such thoughts become audible, the preacher is disposed to reply, "These are questions with which you are not concerned; look to your own salvation." Happily for all of us, such an answer is not often accepted. Most men can perceive that the character of God is the cornerstone of religion, and that to call on them, under a promise of personal safety, to render to mere power the homage which is due to the majesty of righteousness, is to invite them to become hypocrites. The acknowledgment to which men need to be brought is not that God is too strong to make it safe to defy

Him, but that sin *deserves* the punishment denounced against it. Who shall say how many of those who have only been "converted" by appeals to self-interest have merely passed over, as they trusted, to the stronger side? By the account it has to give of the character of God must every religion be tried. Unless this is such as to gain the confidence of men, all external testimony, evidences of miracles or evidences of prophecy, will be vain. The popular evangelical theology rightly teaches that God is good, and just, and wise. It also teaches that untold millions of men and women, and not all of those the worst of the race, pass every year into a place of unspeakable suffering, from which they will never be released. And sober, thoughtful people, not remarkable for sentimentality, say that that is neither good nor wise, and can hardly be just.

An attempt is made to cut all discussions of this kind short by the remark that man cannot rightly judge of the Divine dealings, and that the justice of God is quite above the reach of mortal thought. And of course the Divine justice may have applications in regions far beyond our power to follow it. Nevertheless, justice is in its essential nature the same in heaven and upon earth, and where we can observe it we can judge of it. Let this proposition be denied, and certain consequences of the first importance will follow. If when we have a given procedure before us we cannot tell whether it is just or unjust, all demands made upon us to confess and adore its justice at once fall to the ground. But in truth it is abundantly acknowledged

that we are able so to judge of God's ways. Else what mean the endless theodicies of the last three hundred years? They certify us that, in the judgments of their Christian authors, the appeal from mystery to reason and conscience is required by our moral nature, and on that ground they have been accepted as serviceable to religion.

Again, the saints unhesitatingly assume that they can judge of the doings of God when they sing: "Just and true are Thy ways, O Lord!" Suppose that in the choir one voice were silent; would the excuse of its owner be accepted that he was mute because "he was not qualified to judge"? But to the whole objection it is enough to reply that God Himself constantly appeals to human judgment on His dealings with man. "Are not My ways equal, are not your ways unequal, O House of Israel?" and Christ Himself says, "Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?"

In the same way it is urged that the sovereignty of God forbids human judgment concerning His dealings with mankind. There is a domain of the Divine activity in which this is true. Of the bestowal of His gifts God will give no account. Life with its various endowments is of His grace, and why He has made the Bosjeman inferior in natural ability to the Englishman, and the latter in turn inferior to the ancient Athenian,—why He has left whole families of man in pagan darkness, and vouchsafed to others the Light of Life, He may never tell us. But when His dealings with man on the ground of conduct, and *in the way of reward* and punishment, are concerned,

we are not left in doubt as to the principles of the Divine action. In the Scriptures the justice of God is never treated as a reserved mystery. We may, therefore, conclude that He who *is* eternal justice will not be displeased if we attempt to walk in *His* light. The popular theology has either to proclaim the absolutism of God, as some have dared to do, or to show how an infinite punishment can possibly have been deserved by a finite creature. When it has done that it will still have to explain how everlasting suffering can be due to the millions upon millions of men and women who die with their religious capacities scarcely developed beyond the rudimentary stage.

Apart, however, from the question of penal justice, the dogma of everlasting Evil brings the whole Divine economy into doubt. Evil is that which ought not to be: its very existence, therefore, is a mystery. But it is a mystery the pressure of which the mind and heart can support as long as we are at liberty to hope that Evil, after being made to subserve some high purpose, will itself be destroyed. But Evil taking its permanent place in the universe as something which God either cannot extinguish or willingly tolerates,—this, if it could be believed, would be no mystery, but an intelligible and most horrible fact. Formerly there were divines who taught that Evil is a Fate; thus limiting Omnipotence. Others, maintaining the freedom of God, dared to assert that He chose Evil as a means of working out His ends; thus subverting morality. In our own days it is usually stated that although Evil is opposed to the Divine will, nevertheless it having entered the universe, it will be tolerated,

and even maintained to all eternity for a high purpose —the glorification of the holiness and justice of God. Let it be well considered how much this statement implies. The true glory of every government consists in the willing obedience of free and intelligent subjects. No human government completely attains that end, but all desire to do so. "What sort of a government would that be?" asked the late Dr. Thomas Guthrie, "where more than half the subjects were in prison?"—adding, "I cannot think the government of God will be like that."

But in truth there is no human government which would acquiesce in permanent disobedience on the ground that the ends of its administration would still be attained if only that disobedience were visited with due punishment. Yet this, or something indistinguishable from it, is freely affirmed of the government of God. Very different is the teaching of Scripture, in which sin is uniformly represented as so hateful to God that nothing in the punishment due to it can reconcile Him to its continuance. His command is not, "Either obey and live happy, or disobey and live miserable;" but, "Obey and live": there is no alternative, for "the soul that sinneth shall die." The representation that God will consent to the continuance of sin for the sake of a tax of suffering, yielding a revenue of glory, is such a one as the humblest agent of a human government would warmly resent, if a similar representation were made concerning its administration.

But, after all, it is the inhumanity of the doctrine of the punishment of earthly human guilt by ever*lasting suffering* which most appals the intellect and

paralyzes the heart. When the last proud word has been spoken of the dignity of man's nature, we still need the assurance that "He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust." The justice of God cannot be such as wholly to exclude compassion. But the doctrine of everlasting suffering represents our Maker as having even less pity than His creatures. I will not dwell on the frightful pictures of endless human woe which some Christian teachers have drawn. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that such representations are only made by the preachers of "little chapels," or by Calvinists. Some of the most fearful descriptions of the sufferings of the lost have come down to us from Saints, Fathers, and Doctors of the Church,—from such men as SS. Augustine, Hilary, and Anselm, from the devoted missionary S. Francis Xavier, and the loving and lovely S. Francis de Sales. It was Thomas Aquinas, Saint and Angelic Doctor—whose mark is strongly imprinted upon the Protestant theology even of our own days—who taught that in order that the saved may the more enjoy their bliss they are allowed to gaze upon the punishment of the wicked. If it is sad that any one should impute a capacity for such enjoyment to the saved, it is even sadder to think that in their inhuman delight they were supposed to be in entire sympathy with God. Thus the doctrine of everlasting punishment is exhibited in the intoxication of triumph.

But there have been other Christians who could see in the prospect of endless human suffering nothing at which to rejoice. "Imagine," says Bishop Newton,

"numberless creatures produced out of nothing . . . delivered over to torments of endless ages, without the least hope or possibility of relaxation or redemption. Imagine it you may; but you can never seriously believe it, nor reconcile it to God and goodness."* The humble-minded and devout John Foster, the essayist, after years of reflection upon this doctrine wrote: "I acknowledge my inability (I say it reverently) to admit this belief together with a belief in the Divine goodness."†

The well-known commentator, Albert Barnes, accepted the dogma of eternal evil, but only as a tremendous burden which he could not escape. "I am," he said, "struck dumb. It is all dark, dark, dark to my soul, and I cannot disguise it."‡ And now let a plain question be asked: Is this the keynote of assured conquest and triumph? Did Christ indeed come to cover us all with this darkness? Or will the world be won by a gospel which strikes its followers dumb? It is permitted to form some judgment of a doctrine by its effects. Truth may be expected to work well, or, as we say, to "save"; falsehood to work ill, *i.e.*, to destroy, and so it is here. This doctrine, more than anything else in religious teaching, is accountable for the open infidelity and

* "Dissertations," No. 60.

† "Life and Correspondence," vol. ii., p. 253. Canon Farrar (in "Mercy and Judgment," p. 105) has classed Foster with the believers in everlasting punishment. Foster's words are:—"Nevertheless, I acknowledge myself not convinced of the orthodox doctrine. . . . It is the moral argument that presses irresistibly on my mind."—"Life and Correspondence," p. 250.

‡ "Practical Sermons," p. 125.

the secret unbelief that prevail. It represents the Bible as absolutely committed to something utterly incredible. It blots out the light that should lead to God. It hinders the conversion of the world. The thoughtful among the more civilized non-Christian nations reject Christianity at once on account of it. Missionaries go out to preach it, and are stopped in their work by misgivings until they can see their way to renounce it, as some are doing. At home in very many cases the impossibility of preaching eternal punishment often makes the preacher altogether silent as to that tribulation and anguish which will assuredly be the portion of every man who persists in doing evil.

The doctrine of everlasting punishment is held very fast by thousands who have never inquired for its scriptural warrant, in the vague belief that it does good. They are mistaken. That which holds the bad in check and steadies those who are weak in virtue is the truth that "God will bring every thought into judgment;" and that "every man shall receive according to his works." Preach that the guilt of sin is measured not by the capacity of the creature, which is finite, but by the being of God, which is infinite, and you fail to produce in the offender that sense of the justice of God which is of the very essence of repentance, and plunge him in moral perplexity.

Such, then, being the present condition of popular theology on this subject, what is the remedy? The old Protestant remedy—a return to the testimony of the Word of God, an intelligent and patient examina-

tion of the Scriptures, with a desire to learn the spirit and scope of their teaching on matters that have been obscured by the traditions of men. I affirm unhesitatingly that in the Scriptures God is represented as the omnipotent Ruler of the universe, and that there is no power, call it Evil, call it Devil, that can defeat His holy purpose, or establish in any corner of the universe a kingdom of eternal Evil, saying to Goodness, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no farther." In the Bible, Evil appears as having a permitted existence, and its ultimate destruction is positively predicted as a part of the determinate counsel of God. The holiness of God will accept no lower triumph than that of becoming all in all. This is the clear teaching of Scripture. We can partly understand the permission of Evil in a probationary state which is to come to an end, and until a judgment day which shall decisively manifest the righteousness of God. But a moral government under which Evil, condemned to abolition, protracted only a respited life, would be a government of very different character from one in which Evil had an abiding place, and an everlasting function. The Scriptures teach that that which ought not to be at all shall not exist for ever.

Nothing would be more profitable to religion at the present time than a critical history of the dogma of everlasting punishment in the Church. Such a history would show among other things how easily the meaning of texts of Scripture is entirely changed when they are exhibited through the refracting medium of an unscriptural and speculative theory of human nature, and further, how zealously good men will contend for

the spurious results of such a process as undoubted parts of the truth of God. In the absence of such a history, the materials for which are not wanting, we find that the popular defence of the doctrine mainly rests on the interpretation given to some half-dozen passages in the Gospels and the Apocalypse. These passages contain expressions which are taken to either assert or imply that punishment is everlasting. Suppose now that they were capable of no other interpretation than this, we should then certainly be confronted with a difficulty. Still the difficulty would only be a limited one. We should have a set of exceptional verses which we could not harmonise with the general teaching of God's Word. At the worst, we should have to hold our judgments in suspense and wait for more light. For we are no longer in that stage of theological science in which it used to be said "the best textuary is the best theologian;" we rather say with Master Tyndall that "the sense of Scripture is Scripture," and that we must collect this sense from it as a whole. But we are not so left. The texts to which I refer, and which contain such phrases as "everlasting fire," whatever they might suggest if they stood alone, do not shut us up to belief in the infinite duration of future punishment. I cannot, of course, ask you to receive my statement on this subject, neither, on the other hand, would it be seemly to ask your judgment on a number of points of learned criticism arising out of those texts. That criticism is happily not inaccessible, and it must now suffice to say further that "of the ninety widely different subjects to which the Scripture writers apply terms which occasionally take

the sense of endlessness, in seventy instances they are confessedly of a limited and temporary nature. This suffices to prove, first, that the *radical* meaning of these words is not endlessness, but a hidden duration; and secondly, that the question whether they are to be taken in a limited or unlimited sense depends on the subject to which they are applied."*

Now the passages I have referred to have been studied, in this our generation, with a learning, combined with a freedom from presuppositions, such as has never been brought to bear upon them before, and when I say that they do not bind a particular sense upon us, I mean that there have been most competent and reverent investigators of the meaning of Scripture, whom they have not so bound. For instance, they did not so bind the late Archbishop Whately, who gave much attention to this subject, and has recorded his convictions in his Lectures on a Future State. These are the words in which that eminent divine states his conclusion on the subject:—

"If death (in the passage 'the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death') be understood to mean everlasting life in misery, then it would appear that Death is never to be destroyed at all, since although no one should be henceforth sentenced to it, it would still be going on as a continuous infliction for ever. On the whole, therefore, I think we are not warranted in concluding, as some have done, so positively concerning this question as to make it a point of Christian faith, to interpret figuratively and not literally the

* "Life in Christ," by the Rev. Edward White, p. 307, where the criticism of the special passages usually relied on is given.

'death' and 'destruction' spoken of in Scripture as the doom of the condemned, and so insist on the belief that they are to be kept there for ever." *

Dr. Weymouth, Head Master of Mill Hill School, and an eminent Greek scholar, and the late Dr. Mortimer, Head Master of the City of London School, have declared that the passages in question do not import the maintenance of an everlasting existence in misery. Dr. Dale of Birmingham, and, in Germany, the eminent divines Olshausen, Rothe, Nitzsch, and Twesten, agree in the same judgment. That in the language ascribed to Him in these passages the Saviour of the world was mercifully warning the rebellious of a most terrible retribution in store for them is most true, but that conviction does not depend on an interpretation contrary to the whole tenor of his teaching.

The question may perhaps be asked: But can we suppose that the Church has been mistaken for many centuries, on a point of so much interest as this? Without referring to the many eminent men in all ages who have rejected the doctrine of everlasting punishment as without warrant in Scripture—and they are more numerous than is commonly supposed, including some of the earliest Fathers—I reply that, when all known circumstances are taken into account, there is nothing unlikely in such a departure from the truth. Church history is largely made up of such deviations from the truth. Especially it should be considered how very soon a thoroughly legal spirit came over the Church, and the whole economy of Christianity was conceived of as a Government. In

* "The Future State;" Eighth Lecture.

such a state of mind we might expect that such minatory passages as we have had in view would be overstrained, as they were by the Latin fathers, some of the most eminent of whom had a very inadequate knowledge of Greek. Especially would this be the case as the Church came in contact with the barbarous nations of pagan Europe whom it undertook to tame. During the ages that succeeded, the severity of the doctrine of eternal suffering was tempered by belief in purgatory, and of a mitigation of hell-torments; and when the Reformation came the reformers were too much occupied with pressing needs to subject the doctrine of eternal evil to special examination. The question whether it is likely that the Church has erred on this point I meet with the words of Alexandre Vinet, written forty years ago:—"Even now, after eighteen centuries of Christianity, we may be involved in some enormous error of which the future will make us ashamed."

And now to conclude. Supposing Christianity freed from this terrible dogma, what will it have gained, and what lost, as a power unto salvation? It will be something that the unity of religion will have been restored. At present many good men think they believe in the eternity of evil—they believe in it, that is, as a doctrine to be assented to, and if necessary defended. But it is for them something abstract: it does not distress them and almost drive them mad. Nor is it a formative truth. Their characters are moulded by something quite different, by something which they apprehend and embrace with their whole nature—by the unspeakable love of a holy God. The

fact is, they have one God, an abstract Being, or rather conception, the creation of perverted human ingenuity, whom they argue about and defend; and another, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is daily forming them more and more to the image of His own glorious Son. Delivered from the burden and bondage of this terrible doctrine, the devout Christian will have only one, and that the true God. Again, the special doctrines of salvation will be strengthened when placed on the rock of the Divine righteousness. At present the cross of Christ is robbed of its proper glory by being connected with announcements which suggest only injustice and cruelty. The Church has shown the cross of Christ on the dark background of a terrible scheme of moral government, and the background has absorbed much, and for some eyes all, of the luminous image. Superpose the cross upon the background of the true, the Divine economy of moral government, and the effect will be not that of contrast, but of blessed superaddition; not that of light upon darkness, but of sunshine upon daylight. When the doctrine of eternal evil has disappeared, no loss will have been sustained, because while, on the one hand, no principles of religious life will have been withdrawn, on the other all the principles which remain will have been invigorated. Is it thought that fear may be too much weakened? But fear never was and never can be a principle of spiritual life; its place is among the guardian and secondary, not among the actuating and primary powers of life. A right fear is at one time faith, taking the form of prudence, and showing itself as wise apprehensiveness of danger.

At another time fear is love, showing itself as sensitiveness to the evil of sin. But the fear which hath torment, and shows itself in hard thoughts of God, is cast out, and a calm reverence remains. What else remains? Faith remains, and is more confident; hope, and is more buoyant; love, and is more fervent, because the objects of all three stand forth with more vividness and fairer beauty when beheld through a medium from which all that once clouded or distorted them has been cleared away.

But concern is felt for others to whom religion is not an inspiration of life, but a discipline of law, and the inquiry is pressed whether Christianity without the doctrine of everlasting punishment will have power to arouse the careless and alarm the indifferent. Why should it not, since the Divine justice remains pledged to uphold the moral order of the universe by the resources of infinite power? Much less than infinite suffering may prove literally intolerable. Preachers of the law will, however, have to speak in future more to the reason and conscience, and less to the nerves; and if this be done wisely, then the power of their ministry will be increased. After all that has been done in our century to represent justice as a mere expedient, there is deep down in men's minds a feeling that it is an end in itself, for the sake of which retributive pain not only may but ought to be inflicted. Mere terror will in time harden man; but many who would bear up against the prospect of pain quail before the prospect of meeting the Judge of all in His righteousness and purity. The thought which awed Voltaire and sobered Heine has not lost

its power. God does not require eternal ages to work out the purposes of His justice. In a single glance of the All-holy may be concentrated a power of eternity that can dissolve the soul which will not be purified.

At present, however, a large number of preachers think it consistent with loyalty to the Divine administration, and fidelity to their people, to leave the latter without warnings of any kind. This is one of the consequences of the survival of the incredible dogma of endless torment. Whenever this disappears, its place must be supplied with a doctrine for which the authority of Scripture can be rightly claimed.

In the meantime the traditional doctrine is a weakness, a hindrance, a reproach to the Church. Individuals perceive its mischievousness and protest against it, but the Church will not move. Mr. Tennyson sees it too, and I believe that he has written this poem in order, so to speak, to "force the hand" of the Church. It is a very difficult hand to force, but the attempt must be made. Left to itself, the Church would probably continue as inert as it is now. Many, indeed, already say, "Why this outcry? Do you not observe that preachers are quietly dropping the doctrine of eternal sin and sorrow out of their discourses?" But a doctrine that has once been proclaimed as of Divine authority cannot be "dropped out." If true, it must be maintained at all costs; if untrue, it must be renounced as explicitly as it was formerly taught. Religious teachers must not play fast and loose with human faith. Let then the Churches understand that in this matter they have to take up a stumbling-block

out of the way of the simple, let them re-examine by the standard of Scripture their doctrine of the moral character of God. Such an examination will be the first indispensable step in that second Reformation for which Christendom waits and yearns, and it will be one of the best antidotes against Despair.

NOTE.

THE question has been publicly asked why in a lecture in which so much has been denied, so little has been affirmed as to the future lot of the wicked. The answer must be made that not only was the treatment of that subject limited by the occasion, but that it was also held that if the doctrine of Eternal Evil be inadmissible, its rejection should not be based on reasons more or less dependent on other beliefs which were themselves in debate. The moral argument, which has been mainly relied on, and which John Foster found "irresistible," is itself a scriptural argument, being based on the scriptural representation of the character of God.

But for the satisfaction of inquirers I add here that the principal difficulties which have troubled the Church respecting the duration of future punishment disappear with the acceptance of the belief which a large and rapidly-increasing number of devout and learned men are acknowledging as the teaching of Scripture, and which is sometimes known as "Conditional Immortality," but is better characterized *as the doctrine* of "Life in Christ."

According to the commonly received belief, man was created immortal. His bodily part might become subject to death through sin, but his being was divided, and it was said that his soul in any case would live for ever in virtue of its proper vigour. But the Scripture knows nothing of this inherent, indefeasible quality as belonging to our race. It teaches that man was made out of the dust, and endowed by his Creator with powers adapting him for an endless existence, to which he was indeed called, but that in the appointment of God his actual enjoyment of immortality was made contingent upon his obedience to the will of his Maker. For him, then, immortality was not a destiny, but a prize to which he was to aspire. In the language of Witsius, he was "a candidate for immortality." But failing in obedience, he forfeited the reward. He did not, however, thereby incur the penalty of endless suffering—of which no hint had been given in the warning addressed to Adam at his entrance on his probation —but that of loss of existence.

Immediately upon man's failure Divine redemption was brought in, and the respited race entered upon a new probation. The immortality which our first father had not gained was placed anew within human reach by the "Second Adam," the "Lord from heaven." The Eternal Word became incarnate, in order that He might give eternal life to men, and there is no immortality but that of which He is the source. There is no such contradiction as immortal death, and eternal death is death from which there is no restoration. At the day of judgment the justice of

God will be manifested alike in the treatment of the righteous and of the wicked. Those who have in this life sought to do the will of God will "abide for ever" in blessedness, and those who, having done evil, have heard the summons to repentance, with the promise of Divine Mercy, and have nevertheless despised the goodness of God, and obstinately persisted in rebellion, will suffer grievous and deserved punishment, and finally be destroyed.

The doctrine thus imperfectly sketched is not a theory devised to meet a theological difficulty, but results from the application of what are believed to be the only sound principles of interpretation to the language of Scripture; whereas the dogma of everlasting punishment has for its main support the purely human assumption of the natural immortality of the soul. But the doctrine will be greatly misapprehended if its deliverances concerning the judgment of the wicked are taken for the whole, and still more so if after it has been thus mutilated it is simply substituted for the dogma of everlasting punishment, and forced into association with the harsh and unauthorized human suppositions which have gathered around that belief. In the popular theology much has been presumed concerning matters which the Almighty has reserved to Himself, and as to which a sound mind will rest in the confidence not only that "the Judge of all the earth" will "do right," but that the great Father of men will deal mercifully with all His children. While we know that the revealed principles of the Divine government will be firmly upheld, we *may expect that* in its administration the thoughts of

God will be found far higher than our own thoughts. Thus, while the doctrine of "Life in Christ" maintains that nothing in Scripture warrants the expectation that those who have knowingly and wilfully rejected the grace of God here will have a further probation in the world to come, no narrow inferences as to the lot of mankind in general are to be drawn from such a statement. Whether for others—for the heathen abroad, or for the myriads in so-called Christian countries who grow up in ignorance and remain morally undeveloped—there may not be a further opportunity of salvation, is a question apart from the doctrine of Life in Christ, to be decided upon its own evidence. Neither, again, is it affirmed by this doctrine that the faith which saves the soul by uniting it to Christ is necessarily dependent on an intellectual knowledge of His character and claims. Men will be judged at last by One who reads the heart, and Who if He can see there the sin that escapes the eye of man, will also in the great day acknowledge the nature, tendencies, and aptitudes of much goodness which even its possessors had not dared to recognise. There can be no objection to any larger hope, which does not teach that, however Light and Love may be despised now, all will certainly be made right at last. All character is hastening to a crisis, and "life to the godless must be the beginning of destruction, since nothing but God and that which pleases Him can permanently exist."*

Those who may desire to study this subject more fully are recommended to consult the volume "Life in

* Dr. Thomson, Archbishop of York, in his Bampton Lectures.

Christ," by the Rev. Edward White, where they will find all its aspects calmly and fairly considered, and the doctrine placed firmly on a scriptural basis. I would also heartily recommend the treatise "Debt and Grace," by the late Professor Hudson of Cambridge, U.S.A., author of a Greek Concordance to the New Testament, were it more accessible than it is. In this volume the author has traced the doctrine of future punishment throughout Church history, and brought the various theodicies to the test of Scripture. The great learning, clear judgment, and calm patient temper of Professor Hudson make it a matter of regret that his work has not been republished in this country. For briefer and more popular expositions of the doctrine, or its particular bearings, reference may be made to "The Duration and Nature of Future Punishment," by the Rev. H. Constable, M.A., Prebendary of Cork; "Eternal Punishment and Eternal Death," by the Rev. Professor Barlow, Trinity College, Dublin; "Popular Ideas on Immortality," by the Rev. W. Kerr, M.A., Incumbent of Tipton; "Endless Suffering not the Doctrine of Scripture," by the Rev. T. Davis, M.A., Vicar of Roundhay, Yorkshire. Among the clergy of the Church of England, however, no one has done more to make this doctrine known than the Rev. Samuel Minton, who has willingly sacrificed his ecclesiastical position and prospects in order to be free to seek the good of his countrymen. His principal works are, "The Harmony of Scripture on Future Punishment," "The Way Everlasting," and "The Glory of Christ in the Reconciliation of all Things."

27 405ST 4649
10/97 BR
53-005-00 GBC

STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
CECIL H. GREEN LIBRARY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004
(415) 723-1493

All books may be recalled after 7 days

DATE DUE